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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
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R 251303Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3620

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THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAMS WAS SENT ACTION NEW DELHI INFO MADRAS
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QUOTE:

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: THE CONGRESS PARTY IN WESTERN INDIA

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

THE ONCE MONOLITHIC CONGRESS PARTY IN WESTERN INDIA IS NOW FRAGMENTED. POLITICAL POWER AND PERSONALITIES RATHER THAN IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES ARE AT THE ROOT OF DISINTEGRATION. WITH SIX CONGRESS ELEMENTS IN MAHARASHTRA AND TWO EACH IN GUJARAT AND MADHYA PRADESH, IN NO STATE IN WESTERN INDIA DOES THE PARTY SHOW CURRENT CHANCES OF EITHER UNITING OR POSING A THREAT TO JANATA. OF THE TWO MAJOR CONGRESS ELEMENTS, CONGRESS(I) AND CONGRESS (SWARAN SINGH), THE FORMER HAS GREATER LEGISLATIVE STRENGTH IN MAHARASHTRA AND GUJARAT WHILE THE LATTER HAS AN EDGE IN MADHYA PRADESH. MRS. GANDHI STILL REMAINS THE MOST POPULAR CONGRESS LEADER IN WESTERN INDIA. END SUMMARY
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2. GENERAL

LOSS OF POLITICAL CONTROL AT BOTH THE CENTER AND IN ALL THE THREE STATES, THE ABSENCE OF UNIFYING PARTY LEADERSHIP, AND DESERATION OF SOCIALLY DOMINANT GROUPS LARGELY EXPLAIN THE CURRENT WEAKNESS OF THE CONGRESS ELEMENTS IN WESTERN INDIA. CONGRESS(I)

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SEEMS TO BE SOLELY DEPENDENT ON MRS. GANDHI'S PERSONAL POPULARITY. ITS CHARACTERISTIC FEATURE CONTINUES TO BE SUPPORT FROM THE MINORITY GROUPINGS LIKE THE HARIJANS, THE TRIBALS AND THE MUSLIMS. A MAJORITY OF THE SOCIALLY DOMINANT GROUPS LIKE THE MARATHAS IN MAHARASHTRA AND THE PATELS IN GUJARAT HAVE NO LONGER WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORTED THE PARTY, ALTHOUGH SWARAN SINGH ELEMENT DOES SOME FOLLOWING.

3. OF THE THREE STATES ONLY IN GUJARAT DOES THE INDIRA ELEMENT OF THE OLD CONGRESS PARTY SHOW REAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH. STATE DETAILS ARE:

4. MAHARASHTRA: CONGRESS CONTINUES TO FRAGMENT

ON AUGUST 18 NINE FORMER CONGRESS (I) MLAS FROM VIDARBHA FORMALLY ANNOUNCED THE FORMATION OF THE VIDARBHA CONGRESS, WHICH BECOMES THE SIXTH CONGRESS ELEMENT IN MAHARASHTRA. BHAURAO MULIK, GOM MINISTER OF STATE FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE ACTING PRESIDENT OF THE NEWLY FORMED PARTY SAID THAT THE VIDARBHA CONGRESS WILL SOON START ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS IN THE REGION. THE FORMATION OF A SEPARATE PARTY IS MORE SYMBOLIC THAN SIGNIFICANT. THE NINE MLAS HAD EARLIER SPLIT WITH CONGRESS (I) AND, COLECTIVELY HAVE BEEN PART OF THE RULING COALITION, THE PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATIC FRONT IN MAHARASHTRA. THREE OF THEM RECEIVED BERTHS IN THE 34 MEMBER RULING COALITION WITH JANATA AND ITS ALLIES WHO COLLECTIVELY HOLD 180 MLA SLOTS IN A HOUSE OF 288.
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5. THE CURRENT DIVISION OF THE ONCE MONOLITHIC MAHARASHTRA CONGRESS IN THE STATE LEGISLATURE IS:

CONGRESS (I) : 59
MAHARASHTRA PROGRESSIVE : 40"
LEGISLATURE CONGRESS
(SHARAD PAWAR GROUP)
CONGRESS (SWARAN SINGH/VASANT DADA PATIL) : 25
VIDARBHA CONGRESS : 9"
MAHARASHTRA SOCIALIST (2"
CONGRESS (S.B. CHAVAN GROUP)
CONGRESS (O) S.K. PATIL : NIL

(THE STARRED ELEMENTS, ALONG WITH THE JANATA AND ALLIES, FROM THE CURRENT PAWAR COALITION GOVERNMENT).

6. THE CURRENT FRAGMENTATION OF THE MAHARASHTRA CONGRESS IS IN STARK CONTRAST TO THE PAST. CONGRESS ALONE RULED THE STATE FROM 1937 TO 1978. IN 1972 STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS THE THEN MONOLITHIC CONGRESS BAGGED 210 OF 270 SEATS.

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7. COMMENT: THE FORMATION OF VIDARBHA CONGRESS IS SEEN AS A SETBACK TO MRS. GANDHI. IN THE FEBRUARY STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS CONGRESS (I) TOOK 46 OF 66 MLA SEATS IN VIDARBHA, WHICH WAS HER ONE GEOGRAPHICALLY SUCCESSFUL EFFORT IN THE STATE. OTHER DEFECTIONS MAY OCCUR EITHER THROUGH THE CARROT OF SHARING THE BENEFITS OF A COALITION MEMBER OR THE STICK OF THE ABRASIVENESS OF HER CONGRESS (I) STATE LEADER TIRPUDE.

8. ALTHOUGH RANKED SECOND IN MLA STRENGTH IN THE STATE LEGISLATURE THE SHARAD PAWAR GROUP IS CURRENTLY THE MOST POWERFUL. THE FACT THAT PAWAR AND TEN COLLEAGUES FROM THE GROUP ARE IN THE STATE MIINISTRY, GIVES THEM CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL LEVERAGE COMPARED TO OTHER CONGRESS ELEMENTS. A REFLECTION OF THIS IS THAT MAJORITY OF THE MPCC OFFICE BEARERS AND A LARGE MAJORITY OF DISTRICT CONG-
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RESS COMMITTEES HAVE FORMALLY MOVED TO SUPPORT THE PAWAR GROUP, AS HAVE MOST OF THE YOUTH CONGRESS UNITS. HOWEVER, THE MOST IMPORTANT STRENGTH FACTOR FOR THE PAWAR GROUP IS THE COVERT SUPPORT PAWAR RECEIVES FROM Y.B. CHAVAN, HIS LONG TIME MENTOR, WHO STILL IS CONSIDERED THE SINGLE MOST POWERFUL CONGRESSMAN IN THE STATE. THOUGH CHAVAN IS FORMALLY ALIGNED WITH SWARAN SIGH'S CONGRESS, WHICH SUPPORTED THE VASANT DADA PATIL GROUPING, IT IS WIDELY HELD THAT CHAVAN SECRETLY SUPPORTS PAWAR. AS A RESULT OF THE CHAVAN BENEDICTION, PAWAR GROUP ENJOYS THE SUPPORT OF AT LEAST HALF THE RURAL COOPERATIVES AND COOPERATIVE SUGAR FACTORIES, AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION SINCE IT PLACES PAWAR AHEAD OF ALL OTHER CONGRESS ELEMENTS IN TERMS OF PURCHASING POWER.

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9. GEOGRAPHICALLY, PAWAR'S MLA SUPPORTERS REPRESENT A BROAD SPECTRUM OF THE RURAL REGIONS OF MAHARASHTRA, UNLIKE CONGRESS (I) AND THE VIDARBHA GROUP WHICH ARE CONFINED TO VIDARBHA, AND TO CONGRESS (SWARAN SINGH - VASAND DADA PATIL) WHICH IS LIMITED TO POCKETS IN WESTERN MAHARASHTRA.

10. OBSERVERS HERE, IT SHOULD BE STRESSED, SEE NO IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES AMONG THE SIX MAHARASHTRA CONGRESS ELEMENTS. WHAT IS INVOLVED IS POWER, THE BENEFITS WHICH FLOW FROM POWER, AND, TO A LESSER DEGREE, PERSONALITIES.

11. GUJARAT: CONGRESS (I) DOMINANT
THE GUJARAT CONGRESS HAS BASICALLY REMAINED WITH MRS. GANDHI WHEN THE CONGRESS SPLIT IN DECEMBER 77 THE MLA BREAKDOWN WAS CONGRESS (I) 50 AND CONGRESS (SWARAN SINGH) 15.

12. THE CURRENT COUNT IS CONGRESS (I) 58 AND CONGRESS (SWARAN SINGH) 7 OUT OF A LEGISLATIVE MEMBERSHIP OF 182.

13. TIGHTKNIT REGIONALISM, PERSONAL POPULARITY OF MRS. GANDHI, ESPECIALLY AMONG GUJARAT'S TRIBAL AND KSHATRIYA (SMALL LANDHOLDERS) MLAS, WHO FORM THE BULK OF CONGRESS (I) LEGISLATIVE STRENGTH AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITY OF GUJARAT CONGRESS (I) LEADER-SHIP EXPLAIN THE DOMINANCE OF CONGRESS (I). LEGISLATORS OF THE TWO
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CONGRESS ELEMENTS, BUT PARTICULARLY CONGRESS (I), ARE CONCENTRATED IN THE SIX DISTRICTS OF SOUTHERN AND EASTERN GUJARAT. THE AREA IS HEAVILY POPULATED WITH ADIVASIS, WHO SEE MRS. GANDHI AS THEIR PROTECTOR, AND THE SMALL KSHATRIYA FARMERS, WHOSE VOTE MRS. GANDHI HAS ALWAYS TAKEN. GUJARAT CONGRESS (I) LEADER SOLANKI IS CONSID-ERED TO BE AN UNRIVALLED LEADER OF THE KSHATRIYA COMMUNITY IN THE STATE. MOST OF THE MLAS FROM THAT COMMUNITY HAVE OPTED FOR CONGRESS (I) AS A RESULT OF SOLANKI'S PERSONAL POPULARITY WITH THEM. IN CONTRAST, CONGRESS (SWARAN SINGH) HAS NEITHER ADIVASI NOR KSHATRIYA LEADER TO CONSOLIDATE THESE ELEMENTS INTO ITS FOLD.

14. MADHYA PRADESH: CONGRESS (SWARN SINGH) BY A BIT OVER CONGRESS (I):
RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO CONGRESS ELEMENTS ARE NOT ACRIMONIOUS, CONGRESS (SWARAN SINGH) LEADERS, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE NOT, AS IN MAHARASHTRA, CRITICIZED MRS. GANDHI. THE DECEMBER 77 SPLIT SAW THOSE MADHYA PRADESH POLITICIANS WITH POWER BASES OF THEIR OWN REMAIN WITH CONGRESS (SWARAN SINGH) WHILE THOSE WHOSE POLITICAL EXISTENCES DEPENDED - AND DEPENDS - ON MRS. GANDHI. OF THE 320 MLAS, 84 WERE ELECTED AS CONGRESS. THE CURRENT HEAD COUNT IS ROUGHLY CONGRESS 50 AND CONGRESS (I) 34, A COUNT THAT HAS BEEN FAIRLY

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STABLE SINCE THE SPLIT. AS IS THE CASE IN GUJARAT, CONGRESS, WITH ONLY ABOUT 25 PERCENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SEATS, THE TWO CONGRESS PARTIES HAVE NO CHANCE, JOINTLY OR SEPARATE, OF ENTERING THE MP MINISTRY. RESULTANTLY THE MP CONGRESS UNITS ARE MERELY MARKING TIME.
COURTNEY UNQUOTE
GLHEEN

NOTE BY OC/T: MESSAGE DELAYED IN TRANSMISSION.

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